

409.3 Requirements for Providing Conservation Planning Assistance.

(a) All Tennessee NRCS conservation planners will be certified. The State Resource Conservationist (SRC) will establish minimum criteria to be met by NRCS employees to be a “certified conservation planner.”

(1) A certified conservation planner is a person who possesses the necessary skills, training, and experience to implement the NRCS nine-step planning process to meet client objectives in solving natural resource problems.

(2) The certified conservation planner has demonstrated skill in assisting clients to identify resource problems, to express the client’s objectives, to propose feasible solutions to resource problems, and leads the client to choose and implement effective alternatives that treat the resource concerns.

(3) The following certification levels are being established by this policy. Their definitions and criteria for certification are covered in this policy. The Tennessee State Conservationist has the authority to establish additional certification categories as needed in the future to cover degrees of scope and complexity in planning environments.

- (i) Conservation Planner Certification.
- (ii) CNMP Planner Certification.
- (iii) Waste Handling and Storage Certified Specialist.
- (iv) Nutrient Management Certified Specialist (Animal Feeding Operations).
- (v) Pest Management Planner Certification.
- (vi) Wetland Certification.
- (vii) Prescribed Burning Job Approval Authority (Level I and Level II).

(b) All plans developed with the assistance of NRCS and partner employees will be approved by an NRCS or partner certified conservation planner. When a conservation plan is being used to meet a specific USDA program managed by NRCS, it must be approved by the NRCS official with the appropriate planning authority.

(c) The Area Conservationist will establish and implement a process to ensure that field planners receive the appropriate training for certification or renewal of certification. All other employees needing a level of certification will receive their training guidance from their supervisors.

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(2) The State Resource Conservationist will be responsible for maintaining the list of qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required for certified conservation planner designations. The list is included in this policy in GM-180, Part 409.9. These qualifications include knowledge of the following fundamentals such as:

- (i) Crop production.
- (ii) Grazing systems.
- (iii) Plant growth.
- (iv) Soil-water-plant relationships.
- (v) Plant identification.
- (vi) Nutrient uptake.
- (vii) Erosion processes.
- (viii) Water quality.
- (ix) Proficiency in scientific tools and models with emphasis on RUSLE2 and

WIN-PST.

- (x) Animal production.
- (xi) Conservation practices and systems common to the assigned work area.
- (xii) Wildlife management.
- (xiii) State and local laws and regulations that may influence conservation

planning.

(3) Training will be provided through NRCS training courses, on-the-job training, workshops, self-improvement studies, or equivalent courses and methods approved by the State Resource Conservationist as meeting the identified training need for certified planners.

(4) The State Resource Conservationist will be responsible to ensure that all NRCS employees approving conservation plans meet minimum NRCS certified conservation planner requirements.

(d) The State Resource Conservationist will establish and maintain a list of NRCS certified conservation planners and other certification designations in the State consisting of NRCS employees, volunteers, and employees of Soil Conservation Districts.

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